

Faith & Inspiration

Seeking Symmetry

By Vincent V. Mashburn

There are people who cannot help but view relationships as primarily transactional.

That is, such a thesis assumes that relationships are based on an expectation of exchange and a presumption of reciprocity.

Part of the premise of this kind of perception is that actions of individuals are generally motivated by a prospect of mutual transaction of benefits — such as support, relief, accommodation, or indulgence — rather than by pure benevolence, compassion, or generosity without any kind of reward or compensation.

Interestingly, many of those who may operate by such a code of conduct typically find themselves particularly averse to scenarios in which they may end up being beholden to another party due to a sense of obligation. When a favor or boon has been provided but not yet or sufficiently complemented, the recipient may conclude that an impression of debt has been incurred. Such perceived imbalance is of course considered unsatisfactory and even objectionable.

The Bible emphasizes grace and kindness as manifestations of Godly love, not motivated by any promise of profit or

remuneration and not dependent upon circumstances or disposition (Proverbs 17:17; Philippians 2:3). In our natural and fallen state, we sometimes struggle with the notion of unconditional friendship. We may be unaccustomed to such selflessness, and we may find that it makes us uneasy, suspicious, or anxious and puts us in a position of feeling compulsion towards the benefactor.

In the "Star Trek: Enterprise" television series, one of the standout characters is a man named Thy'lek Shran, a commander in the Andorian Imperial Guard.

The Andorians are a blue-skinned, battle-centric species who are portrayed as, among other things, the nemesis of the Vulcans, the species dedicated to logic.

Throughout the series, we observe the ongoing conflict between these two races which eventually evolves into a foundation for an alliance derived from wary but mutual respect.

As is typical, the humans of Earth sometimes find themselves in the middle, having to choose sides, although the likes of Captain Jonathan Archer and the crew of the prototypical USS Enterprise NX-01 often seek some semblance of

balance of power or, at best, neutrality. Through various interactions with the Andorians in general and Shran in particular, Archer experiences many opportunities to foster a burgeoning relationship with this alien species.

Shran, for his part, starts off exhibiting a degree of suspicion and contempt towards outsiders, quite characteristic for his people. He habitually refers to humans derisively as "pink skins."

On one occasion, Archer directly assists Shran in uncovering the duplicity of a group of Vulcans attempting to engage in espionage against the Andorians. Shran is grudgingly grateful towards Archer for aiding in preventing an escalation of hostilities and indicates that the Andorians are now indebted to him for his support.

As the show's story progresses, Shran comes to conclude, thanks to his experiences in various situations, that humans in general, and Archer in particular, may not be so entirely despicable. In fact, he ends up deeming Archer a relatively honorable individual.

In a later episode, Shran comes to Archer's aid during a particular mission, citing the debt of honor owed from Archer's previous intervention.

ARCHER: So, how did you get picked for this assignment?

SHRAN: I volunteered. It made sense. I've had the greatest amount of contact with pink — with humans, and the last time we met you helped my people avert a war. I don't like unpaid debts.

ARCHER: We keep doing each other favors.

SHRAN: Isn't that how alliances are born?

The Andorians, along with the Vulcans and humans, come to eventually learn that positive and beneficial relationships are established not simply on the basis of doing each other favors, but on mutual concern for each other's welfare. Indeed, these three species are destined to become some of the key founding members of the United Federation of Planets which will significantly influence the direction of future history throughout the galaxy.

It is perhaps natural to be drawn towards experiencing a sense of duty or responsibility to live up to the kindness or service committed on our behalf.

At the same time, we can end up finding such a "burden" of obligation uncomfortable or distasteful. Indeed, relationships based on

such burdens can find themselves caught in a perpetual cycle of seeking symmetry or equilibrium to avoid one party "owing" another. This can result in unhealthy fixations on parity or similitude.

It is one thing to merely prefer a lack of ongoing indebtedness. The Bible certainly encourages us to avoid financial debt which results in overwhelming burden, sometimes equating such a state essentially to slavery (Proverbs 22:7). We are also urged to only borrow what we can repay (Psalm 37:21). It is true that the metaphor of debt is sometimes applied to illustrate the disrupting result of sin. While the version of the so-called "Lord's prayer" found in the gospel of Luke (Luke 11:2-4) employs the term "sin" when petitioning forgiveness, the apostle Matthew's rendition (Matthew 6:9-13) relies on the wording of "debt" and "debtor" — which probably makes some sense considering he was a tax collector. In this context, Matthew was describing the fulfillment of our moral obligations using an analogy of deficits to be discharged.

In the realm of personal relationships, there can be layers of complexity and nuance. We are called to exhibit God's grace without expectation of accolades

or personal gain (Deuteronomy 15:10; Proverbs 3:27; Luke 6:33-35). God's love towards us is more than merely transactional. As believers, we certainly acknowledge that, as a result of the rift in our relationship caused by sin, we ultimately owed a spiritual debt to God that we could not pay. We likewise recognize that Jesus paid for this debt — which he himself did not owe — on our behalf.

This offer of forgiveness has been extended not with the expectation that we could somehow reciprocate any kind of benefit of commensurate value, but rather, as an essential expression of God's goodness and devotion.

And so, we are moved to respond to this demonstration of kindness with kindness of our own, not simply because we may feel some sort of imposition, but because it is right and proper.

We need not be weighed down by the onus of seeking symmetry with God. Rather, we strive only to emulate the magnanimity that was manifested towards us (Luke 6:36).

Lifestyle

American Legion Honors Former Member



Nancy Bennett (front center) and family members shared memories and stories of Master Sergeant (Ret) John Mike Bennett with the crowd of friends who gathered to honor him. Photo Courtesy of Post 43

By Charlie Hudson

Standing room only and almost not enough of that was the scene Saturday, July 12, 2025 at John G. Salley American Legion Post 43 in Homestead.

The occasion was the "Dedication of the Newly Renovated Lounge honoring Master Sergeant (Ret) John Mike Bennett".

Family and friends came together for the ceremony that was to be followed by a dinner and music from the popular Barstool Billygoats band. Although Bennett and his wife Nancy relocated to Lehigh Acres a few years ago, their sixteen years in Homestead were filled with caring about and for the Post.

Meeting in Saint Louis where he was assigned as a recruiter and she was an attendant with TWA airlines, membership in the American Legion for him and the American Legion Auxiliary for her was one of many things they had in common. Joining the local Legion in 2006 when they moved to Homestead was one of their early actions.

At the time of his death August 22, 2024, the Columbus, Indiana native had spent thirty-three years of his seventy-three in the U.S. Army Reserves. The Vietnam veteran served in other overseas assignments as well and accumulated numerous awards during his career.

The rest of his years were equally devoted to supporting veterans. He was a life member of the

Veterans of Foreign Wars, AmVets, and an American Legion Legionnaire and Son.

Among the multiple positions he held in Post 43 was Service Officer. "He was very active," his wife said of his tireless efforts to help veterans struggling to get their full disability benefits from Veterans Administration. The paperwork can be daunting and the bureaucracy disheartening.

"He was able to help a lot them get their disability," she said with pride.

She had been surprised last September when they held a Celebration of Life in Lehigh Acres and more than a dozen members of Post 43 traveled up to attend. She was proud too that much of their family was joining her and would have the chance to meet the people who thought so highly of her husband.

Jason Nimark, current Post Commander, quieted the packed room in greeting everyone, and acknowledging former post commanders, Post officers, and other special guests.

In reading General Douglas McArthur's quote of, "The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war," Nimark said,

"Mike bore those scars quietly and with dignity."

Among the list of significant contributions, the Bennetts literally

helped the Post make it through the impact of COVID closures and restrictions. They selflessly served many dinners, covering the costs of the food and then donating any proceeds back to the Post. With little revenue coming in, Bennett ensured the Post's mortgage payments were made, waiting for the finances to recover before being re-paid.

The decision to re-name the lounge was seen to be a fitting tribute and Nimark closed his remarks before the ribbon-cutting.

"As we rededicate this lounge, it is more than a plaque. Let this lounge serve as a reminder and we will never forget him and his service."

Applause filled the room and the cloth dropped from the bright, lighted sign, "MSGT JOHN "MIKE" BENNETT LOUNGE".

To further commemorate the afternoon, a Special Edition Challenge Coin had been created and Nimark presented the first coin to Nancy Bennett who, with the doors pulled open, led the way for everyone to come back in.

The John G. Salley American Legion Post 43, 399 S Krome Ave, Homestead holds different activities for members and others open to the public. Check their Facebook page for the monthly calendar or call (305) 247-8233.



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